



arts•gram

A Daily
Publication of the
National Veterans
Creative Arts
Festival

for Thursday, October 19, 2000

For the Wilsons, Music is All in the Family

By Fran Heimrich, VA Central Office

Louis Wilson and his son David are the first father and son to perform at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Louis entered his first competition in 1993 and convinced his son David to join him in 1995. Both play the guitar.

This year, they won first place in the national music competition's instrumental group, country and jazz/R&B categories. The Wilsons will play a guitar duet of "Workin' Man Blues/Alabama Jubilee" in Saturday's show. Louis said he and David often just sit and play together, and they thought this particular medley sounded good. "To our pleasure, others liked it too," he said.

"I just turned 71," said Louis, "and I think this is the finest birthday present that a guy could have—to be able to work with your son on the stage at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., where so many famous and gifted people have performed."

Louis Wilson began playing the guitar in the late 1930s and said he just picked it up as he went along. He introduced his son David to music at an early age. In fact, his father wanted him to be a concert violinist. That wasn't to be, but David has been playing the guitar since his father gave him his first one when he was nine years old. He played that guitar so much in the first two days, his father said, that he wore the skin off the tips of his fingers.

David went on to become a professional musician, playing with such notables as George Clinton and Ricky Skaggs until an arthritic condition became disabling.

"The doctors took out three joints in my fingers," said David. "VA did it for me,

and they really took great care of me. The VA deserves a gold medal for the care they gave me."

Louis said VA staff asked David to bring his guitar to the hospital and hold it in his hands while they measured the curvature he would need to be able to continue to play. When they re-built David's fingers, they fused the fingers so that a slight curvature remained, allowing him to continue playing guitar.

"Every day is a great day," said David, "but some days are greater than others." He said the Festival "is a wonderful program for veterans who have creative gifts to offer—your self-worth is heightened. Music and arts are wonderful stress relievers."

Both father and son live in southern Virginia and both are Navy veterans. "There's been a Wilson in every major conflict this country has had," said Louis.

Louis, participating in his seventh National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, said it's the highlight of his year. "My quality of life is greatly enhanced just by having the opportunity to contribute to the overall mission of this event," he said. "There are many veterans who suffer from having served their country. The VA and this Festival promote healing in a multitude of ways—from stirring the creative juices to reawakening a sense of personal worth and esteem."

Choir Member Plans a Special Reunion

For Gary Bergner, an Air Force veteran from Los Angeles, being at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival this week has special meaning beyond showcasing his singing talent. Later this week, Bergner will reunite with his parents, whom he hasn't seen in 18 years.

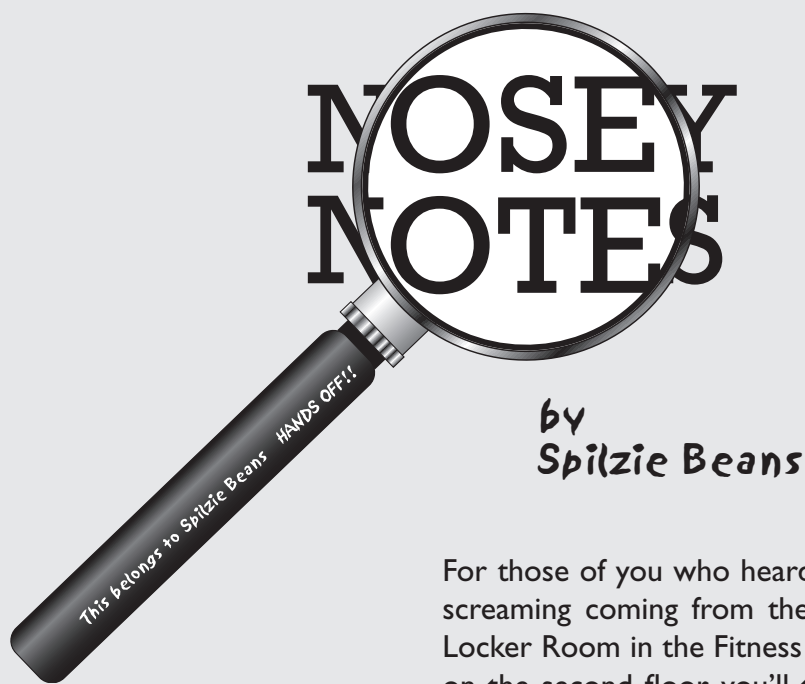
Bergner is one of 12 members of the New Directions Choir, first-place winners in the national music competition, vocal group-pop category. The Choir is made up of formerly homeless veterans who were residents of New Directions, a long-term residential treatment center located on the grounds of the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center.

They have performed at more than 50 events in the L.A. area, most recently at the Democratic National Convention this

summer. Bergner and the other Choir members, led by Steven Boulden, will perform "We Are Made As One" a cappella during Saturday's show.

On Friday, Bergner plans to rent a car and drive to his brother's home in Bluemont, Va., where his elderly parents live. His father celebrated his 86th birthday a few days ago. Bergner will have dinner with his family, and hopes they'll be able to attend the show at Constitution Hall.

Though he is proud to be here in Washington performing with his gold medal-winning group and demonstrating how he and the other members have turned their lives around, he says that for him, "this trip is all about seeing my parents again."



NOSEY NOTES

by
Spilzie Beans

Spilzie sees that the meals are improving, which is good because a member of our Public Affairs staff, Ivonne Chaustre was about to prepare one of her famous recipes from South America. Before we would let that happen to you, we'd make her sing with a mouthful of leftover eggs and bacon. Speaking of food, you won't hear Folly, John Scott's (Louisville, KY) dog, complaining. He has his own special doggy food, *Beans and Things*, a local favorite in Kentucky. Hey Folly... got any leftovers?

Was that you Neal Lewis (Atlanta, GA) doing the Madison along the White House tour? Spilzie hears that you were observed by staff who likened you to a combination of Mr. Bojangles, Fred Astaire and Gregory Hines! But next time, they'd appreciate it if you didn't dance holes in the carpet. Dance on...

The volunteers have truly been gems throughout the week. Spilzie has heard everyone, from participants to the staff in the Medical Room, praising the support from these wonderful volunteers. Take a bow folks, you deserve a standing ovation!

For those of you who heard all the screaming coming from the Ladies Locker Room in the Fitness Center on the second floor, you'll truly be shocked to know what that was all about. It seems that our one and only PR Coordinator for next year's Festival, Frank Cimorelli from Prescott, AZ, absentmindedly walked in there while looking for the exit. The moral of this story is if you are in the Fitness Center and see Frank there, help him out. Show him the way. The sign that says EXIT means leave, Frank; either that or start taking estrogen!

Hey Bill Haworth, what *are* you talking about? If your intention is to extemporize in an elucidating manuarus with presumptive certainty, it is incumbent upon you to speak prosaically with cogent speech modulation and expedient concurrent utterance. This is not an issue to prevaricate, Bill. Remember these are vexillaries you pontificate to. In other words, speak ENGLISH, Bill, not dictionar-ese.

Did you happen to catch the wonderful busts created by the participants in one of the Workshops? I swear one of them looks just like Bob Smith of Salt Lake City, Utah. Looking good Bob, but what's with that hair?

Today's Workshops

Acrylic Painting by Lanet Moravec

This workshop will identify concepts (traditional and contemporary) in acrylic painting techniques and principles. Participants will have an opportunity to apply the techniques on canvas as they capture their personal impressions of the Washington, D.C., Festival experience.

When: 9:00-11:30 a.m.

Where: Martin Room

Drawing the Human Form in Charcoal by Jude Crannitch

This workshop will demonstrate the use of charcoal as a medium to portray the human form.

When: 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Where: Marshall Room

Things to Know

Mount Vernon Tour

Buses for the performers' tour of Mount Vernon will depart at 8:30 a.m. in front of the hotel. Buses for the artists' tour will depart at 1:30 p.m. Cameras are allowed in designated areas on the grounds, but not inside the mansion. Strollers are not allowed inside the mansion. Volunteers will be available to assist wheelchair users on the grounds, but only the first floor of the mansion is wheelchair-accessible. Please wear comfortable clothing and shoes.

Departure Information

Please stop by the Host Room to give your departure flight times and the airport you will be leaving from to Joe or Clarence in Transportation. They need your flight information as soon as possible so they can begin putting a shuttle schedule together. The shuttle schedule will be handed out on Friday.

What's To Know About Mt. Vernon?

George Washington once wrote of his Virginia river plantation, "No estate in United America is more pleasantly situated than this." Those of you going on today's tour of our first President's Mount Vernon Estate will understand what he meant—the view of the Potomac River from the grounds is one of the most breathtaking you'll find anywhere in the area.

Washington acquired the estate in 1754, after the property had been in his family for 80 years. Over the next 45 years, he expanded the home, and personally oversaw every aspect of the improvements—from design to construction to décor.

Each of the 14 rooms now open to the public has been restored and furnished with both original objects used by the Washington family and 18th-century antiques similar to ones found in the home during an inventory done in 1799 after Washington's death.

Here are a few facts about the estate and Washington himself. See how much you know!

- During the 18th century, nearly half of George Washington's 8,000-acre estate was native woodland.
- George Washington had no children of his own. When he married Martha Custis, she was a widow with two young children.
- Washington died in the master bedroom at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1799, and is buried on the grounds.
- Descendants of Washington continued to live at Mount Vernon until 1858, when the 200 remaining acres of the estate were purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association for \$200,000. The group has maintained and operated the estate ever since.
- The museum at Mount Vernon has a collection of the Washingtons' personal possessions, including the silver spurs Washington wore while leading his army to victory in the Revolutionary War; jewelry worn by Martha Washington; and pages from Washington's will.

Creative Quotes

"It's a great feeling to succeed at something in my life. I've never won anything before. Painting on china relaxes my mind, and while I'm doing it, it allows me to concentrate on the painting and not on the past. As a national winner, the members of my art group are proud of me, and it is uplifting to hear others say my artwork is good."

Michael Jay Cruse, Sr., Rudy, AR

"Winning is quite an honor. I had a hard time when people acknowledged my work at first. But with the help of my counselors at the VA, I've become very proud of it. It has helped me to change the way I view myself."

James Fogl, Milwaukee, WI

"This has to be one of the best programs started for veterans to express themselves in a positive way. Therapeutically, there is nothing that surpasses it. All of us aren't athletes. All of us can't ski, dance or fish. So the Creative Arts Festival reaches a greater number of veterans with a wider range of talents. It is truly an honor and a privilege to be a participant and a performer here in Washington, D.C. Nothing can lift one's spirits or sense of self-esteem more."

Lee Williams, Antioch, CA

Multi-Talented Siegrist Pens His Autobiography

Singing is not the only talent Don Siegrist has—he's also a writer who has penned his autobiography. The World War II veteran from Prescott, Ariz., is here this week as the first-place winner in the national music competition's vocal solo, pop category.

But he has also written a book about his early life, including an account of his combat service in the Army during World War II. Siegrist says he wrote the book as therapy to help him deal with some of the bad memories he has from his World War II service and other difficult times in his life.

In the preface of his book, Siegrist

writes that he hopes the book's readers will find some therapeutic value in it as well. "If my story helps you to realize you are not alone, or if it helps others to better understand your own inner warfare, my effort will not have been in vain." He says he highly recommends writing as therapy for life's challenges. In addition to his autobiography, he has also written poems and dramas.

On Saturday, Siegrist will sing "I've Got the World on a String." He's been singing since the age of six, when a schoolteacher noticed his talent while he was singing the national anthem. Siegrist also volunteers at the Prescott, Ariz., VA Medical Center.

"It is exciting to be attending the Festival in Washington, D.C. The arts have allowed me to form new friendships and build self-confidence through new challenges. Performing helps me cope with everyday activities."

Kenneth Durkatz, Tomah, WI

"I thank God for giving me the voice to sing. I love singing and moving, with a smile all the time. I like meeting veterans like myself, and new people from around the United States. I feel honored, happy and overjoyed to be one of the veterans asked to perform here in Washington, D.C. It makes me feel uplifted and special."

Ernest Knox, Temple, TX

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Schedule for Thursday, October 19

Performer's Schedule		Artist's Schedule
	6am	
Breakfast at hotel 7-8:30am	7	7-8:30am Breakfast at hotel
8am	8	8am Team ldrs meet w/ national art chairperson
Team leaders meet with participants.	9	8:30am Team leaders meet with participants
*Equipment, props and costumes moved to Constitution Hall	10	9am
Tour of Mt. Vernon for Performers	11	Teams 6 & 7
		Acrylic painting workshop at hotel, Martin Room
		Teams 8 & 9
		Depart for Arlington National Cemetery/ Women's Memorial
11:30am	Noon	11:30am-1:15pm
Lunch at Hotel		Lunch at hotel
12:30pm	1pm	
Performers depart for Constitution Hall	2	1:30-4:30pm
1:30pm	3	All Artists and Art Team Leaders:
Rehearsal at theater, all performers	4	Mount Vernon Tour
	5	
5pm	6	5-6:30pm
Dinner at Constitution Hall	7	Dinner at hotel
6:30pm	8	7-9pm
Rehearsal with orchestra for all performers	9	Charcoal Portrait Drawing Workshop, Marshall Room
	10	
9:30pm	11	
Depart for hotel		

Announcements

Parking

If you are parking at the hotel, please park on the lower levels of the garage. The upper levels are reserved for vans and buses.

Lost and Found

Lose (or find) something? Lost and Found is located in the Host Room.

Medical & Hospitality Suites

The Hospitality Suite is located on the 4th floor, Suite 442.
The Medical Suite is located on the 2nd floor in Suite 242.



BREAKFAST

Assorted Chilled Fruit Juices
Waffles with Fresh Fruit and Syrup
Scrambled Eggs
Bacon
O'Brien Potatoes
Assorted Cold Cereals

LUNCH

Homemade Vegetable Soup
Marinated Beef with Stir Fry Vegetables
Rice
Assorted Cookies and Brownies

DINNER

Mixed Green Salad
Charcoal Broiled Hamburgers
Barbecue Chicken
Potato Salad and Mashed Potatoes
Fresh Fruit Bowl
Assorted Pies and Cakes
Rolls and Butter